DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 239 RC 017 295

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TITLE The Northern Coalition Teacher Center.
PUB DATE Mar 89
NOTE 7p.; In: Education and the Changing Rural Community: Anticipating the 21st Century. Proceedings of the 1989 ACES/NRSSC Symposium. See RC 017 257.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College School Cooperation; Coordination; Demonstration Programs; *Educational Cooperation; *Education Service Centers; Elementary Secondary Education; *Faculty Development; Higher Education; Postsecondary Education; Program Design; Rural Education; *Shared Resources and Services; *Teacher Centers
IDENTIFIERS Minnesota

ABSTRACT

Bemidji State University and 24 schools in northwestern Minnesota have established a demonstration teacher center. Major goals of the center include: (1) improving the quality of the teaching and learning process; (2) assessing staff development needs and plans; (3) facilitating application of the latest educational research; (4) assisting curriculum development and revision; (5) encouraging the sharing of resources, ideas, and services; (6) promoting communication among educators, school boards, and communities; (7) enhancing professional development and morale; and (8) providing inservice teacher education. The decision-making body for the teacher center is a 40-member policy board comprised mostly of teachers with representatives from administration, school boards, local businesses, parents, and postsecondary institutions. The policy board established the following standing committees: (1) needs assessment; (2) mentorship program (has trained 26 mentors for new and probationary teachers); (3) curriculum development research committee (to develop a resource library of curriculums in northern Minnesota and coordinate sharing of curriculum across member school districts); (4) inservice education and staff development committee; (5) public relations committee; (6) resource center (to pool physical resources in the area); (7) teacher exchange committee; and (8) school climate committee (to provide school climate assessment tools and promote effective staff communication and problem-solving). Currently, the teacher center is offering a variety of workshops and funding teacher mini-grants. (SV)

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THE NORTHERN COALITION TEACHER CENTER

The Northern Coalition for Education, established in 1985, is a voluntary organization comprised of teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members and other interested personnel from 57 school districts in the northwest region of Minnesota. The purpose of the coalition is to establish harmonious working relationships among all elements of the educational community and to encourage positive interaction to insure better education between the schools and the people they serve. The goals of the Coalition are to:

* provide an open forum for the discussion of public matters relating to education;
* support the networking of joint education and research based information through inservice training and other district programs;
* provide correct information to school districts; and,
* lobby together in the legislative process for education issues.

It is within this cooperative atmosphere of discussion and consensus that trust and harmony have developed among the member school districts. The members of the coalition have established a common ground and displayed the ability to work together to promote high quality education in the classroom and better communication in the school and community.

Minnesota Session Laws 1987, Chapter 398, Article 8 Sections 42, 43, and 44, provided funding for five demonstration sites for teacher centers throughout the State of Minnesota. According to the law, the functions of the teacher center are to:

* assist teachers;
* diagnose learning needs;
* experiment with the use of multiple instructional approaches;
* assess pupil outcomes;
* assess staff development needs and plans;

RC 017295

* develop and produce curricula and curricular materials designed to meet the needs of pupils being served;
* provide programs for teachers to meet the special needs of pupils;
* provide programs to familiarize teachers with developments in curriculum formulation and educational research;
* facilitate sharing of resources, ideas, methods, and approaches directly related to classroom instruction;
* improve teachers' familiarity with current teaching materials and products for use in the classroom; and,
* provide in-service programs.

Because many issues on the Coalition agenda are embodied in the goals of the teacher center, it was decided that a grant should be submitted. All schools in the Northern Coalition were invited to participate in the Teacher Center grant proposal. Twenty four schools and Bemidji State University joined together in the grant proposal that was submitted in November of 1987. It was decided that once the grant was awarded, additional schools could become members by having the school board and the teachers bargaining unit sign letters of application and submit them to the Teacher Center.

The State of Minnesota awarded three grants in January of 1988. The Northern Coalition Teacher Center was funded for $65,000 through June 30, 1989. Additional funding sources including grant monies and membership fees are being explored.

The teacher center provides services to schools, families and surrounding communities. It serves as a networking agency that links educators and resources for the purpose of improving the quality of the teaching and learning process. It's major goals are to:

* improve the quality of the teaching/learning process;
* assess staff development needs and plans;
* assist educators with self-identified concerns;
* inform educators of developments in educational research including how research can be used to improve teaching skills, diagnose learning needs, and facilitate the use of multiple instructional approaches;
* provide assistance for revising and building curriculum at the local district level;

* collect, disseminate, and promote sharing of resources, ideas, methods, and approaches related to classroom instruction and decrease unnecessary duplication of services;
* improve communication and increase awareness of educational needs between educators, administrators, board members, and the community;
* enhance professional growth and development;
* provide morale-building support activities for educators;
* provide the opportunity for renewal experiences; and
* provide inservice experiences at the Teacher Center and at local school district sites.

A policy board comprised of a majority of teachers with representatives from administration, school boards, business and industry, parents and post secondary education has been established to act as the decision making body for the teacher center. The board is comprised of: one teacher representative per 75 teachers with a minimum of one teacher per school district; one elementary school principal for every 500 teachers; one secondary school principal for every 500 teachers; one central office administrator for every 500 teachers; one school board member for every 500 teachers; one representative from business and labor for every 500 teachers; one parent representative for every 500 teachers; and one representative from post-secondary education for every 500 teacher for a 40 member board. A nine member Executive Board comprised of a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and five directors was selected. The Executive Board is comprised five teachers, one school board member, one parent and one superintendent.

The Policy Board assures that sound fiscal policies are practiced and designates a fiscal agent to expend the funds needed to accomplish the purposes of the teacher center. The policy board has hired a Coordinator for the Teacher Center. The Teacher Center Coordinator has offices in two locations Bemidji and Thief River Falls which are approximately ninety miles apart.

The Policy Board established the following standing committees:

* Needs Assessment
* Mentorship Program
* Curriculum Development Research
* Inservice/Staff Development
* Public Relations
* Resource Center

* Teacher Exchange
* School Climate

The goals of the needs assessment committee are to: gather data; provide orientation to all educators concerning what a Teacher Center is; and to compile a written needs assessment. To date, needs assessments have been conducted throughout the region. The teacher center coordinator made presentations to local school boards, professional associations, and individual school building staff concerning the Teacher Center. A needs assessment was distributed at all presentations. The items most teachers expressed an interest in were; grade level meetings, teacher exchanges, and newsletters.

The mentorship program committee established three goals: to establish a mentoring program in school districts; to provide mentordhip experiences for new/probationary teachers; and to develop a mentorship handbook. A five day summer institute was designed to train mentors selected by five school districts. Twenty-six mentors were trained in this program. Each mentor was assigned a mentee for the coming year. On going training is taking place.

The goals of the curriculum development research committee are: to facilitate the enhancement of existing curriculum; to develop a resource library of area curriculums in northern Minnesota; and to develop a people resource list of experts in curricular areas. This committee also plans to update teachers on curriculum issues being discussed at the state level and commercially available curriculum programs. It hopes to coordinate the sharing of curriculum across the 27 member school districts.

The inservice/staff development committee decided to: communicate inservice and staff development options available through the Teacher Center Newsletter; develop inservice and consulting opportunities for teachers; and to facilitate the needs of member schools as determined by a needs assessment. The committee suggested that each district have a staff development committee to help teachers determine their staff development needs. They also felt that the committee should explore how smaller and larger districts can cooperate on staff development.

The public relations committee saw their role as one of providing a variety of information to a several groups of peoples people. The felt that all educators must be informed of the existence of the teachers center. The felt that information must be made available to all educators in the Northwest Educational Cooperative Service Unit (ECSU)

region served by the teacher center. The also wish to inform and make information available to the general public as to the role of the teacher center. To accomplish these goals, they are devising handouts and exploring additional funding resources. They also wish to provide public recognition for the work done by teachers, administrators and school boards.

The resource center will provide coordination and pooling of physical resources in all the educational agencies in this area. It will screen materials and see that teacher requests are honored. One or two physical sites as well as a mobile unit will be established to distribute materials and programs to area locations. Opportunities for personal and professional growth will be provided by the resource center. Mini sessions on child abuse and idea exchanges are but a few of the potential programs discussed.

The teacher exchange committee discussed the possibility of providing teacher exchanges for a day, week, or month. They also discussed classroom visitations, grade level support groups, summer institutes, and video evaluations. To make these activities meaningful, the teacher exchange committee is conducting a needs assessment to determine the teaching techniques and methods in which members schools desire assistance. They are in the process of identifying exemplary teachers, programs, and departments that meet the needs of teachers in current techniques and methodologies. They are also developing a method to facilitate visits for teachers to visit exemplary teachers and programs.

On request, the school climate committee will provide a collection of tools that the individual school district can use to assess their school climate. They are developing a training/selection process to assemble an assessment team. They are also devloping an agenda to promote effective communication including how to: work out problems in relationships; use meet and confer; promote positive attitudes toward learning; provide training in self-esteem, encouraging parental involvement, and building morale. They are also developing a collection of programs that allow groups to recognize the work of individuals.

Currently, the Teacher Center is offering a variety of programs including workshops on Assertive Discipline, TESA, Cooperative Learning, Classroom Management, Beginning Appleworks, and Grade Master. They are in the process of arranging newtworking meeting including grade level meetings and subject area meetings. A mini-grant program is being established. Teachers may apply for enabling grants to

support classroom projects, field trips, and enrichment programs. Grants may be provided for: in-house release time to facilitate curriculum writing; exemplary visitations (teacher exchange); attendance at professional conferences; lyceum offerings; and Artist-in-Residence programs. Additional programs will be designed based on continuing needs assessment and requests from members schools and teachers.